

## **We are happy to present selected pages from our Parish Magazine.**

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As I sit writing this introduction it is still October and much needs' to happen before my mind travels towards Christmas.

I am still making sense of the time I had off in the summer and some of the amazing things I encountered. There was the sabbatical and all it held, and since my return I have been to Germany on an exchange with clergy from the deanery of Uberlingen - Stockach. As those who come to church will know, this visit was to celebrate the start of the Reformation and Martin Luther's part in it. More on this from Joyce later in the magazine.

Luther has many aspects of his journey with which I can identify; he was a monk who looked at the world around him and then discovered a different one as he read the words of the greatest book ever written.

As we approach the time when Jesus can openly be talked about we will hear many varied accounts of his life and death. Yet how many of us have taken the time to read the records for ourselves?

For example which Gospel tells the story of the manger? Or the magi?

Many of us have mixed the stories together and sometimes we miss the joy of the season. At a time when we have such easy access to the word of God it is amazing how little we access it. This year why don't you make a point of not listening to "aunt Maud", but looking for yourself and seeing exactly what the Bible says.

In January it is hoped that we will be starting a youth Alpha group to make space for young people to visit the Bible and explore its riches.

If you are an adult and want a safe space to question then ask at church when the next adult course is to be run. Jesus is not only there for Christmas but for all time; this year I hope you discover that Jesus is the reason for the season. May you all have a very peaceful Christmas and may the year ahead bring hope and joy.

Harvie

## MY JOURNEY WITH CHRIST (HIS DOUBTING THOMAS!)



I was brought up a Christian, but lapsed as the years went by. Finally, being a typical teenager, I wouldn't even admit I believed in God; I did, but well, it just wasn't cool.

My mum died of cancer when I was in my early twenties, and that did it for me. I walked into St. Luke's, told God what I thought of him, and walked out the door. It wasn't that I didn't believe in God but I couldn't cope with the pain. At the time I needed him most, I

walked away.

I came back around 20 years ago; looking back that was definitely on God's agenda, but I didn't realise it. I soon made friends, did an Alpha course, but more than anything I wanted to feel the true joy that being a Christian means.

Our youngest son Mark was born with renal failure, and later we found he was autistic with learning difficulties. Our eldest boy John had Aspergers, so life wasn't all that peaceful or easy. What I longed for the most was to feel the true joy, peace and love of being a Christian.

It was a few years ago now that John, to our amazement, decided to live and work in China and I was missing him badly. James had talked before a praise service about a person in the congregation who was feeling sad and lost. He said that God had sent a message saying He would be coming to them soon, and when He did they would know. A few weeks later I started to feel really happy, like when as a child I was waiting for a birthday or Christmas.

I had a dream. In my dream I was with 3 men - I was just with one, married another and lay with the last. I was woken by such a powerful feeling; my heart was pounding and I knew something was going to happen. Then God spoke to me; he told me to open my eyes and look. I did so - I was facing the window and the blind was down, I saw nothing. God said again "Look", and to my amazement I saw faces showing on the blind, young, old, male, female, side views, full face and I knew somehow that these were the many faces of God. I don't know how long it lasted, time didn't seem to exist, but at the end I asked God what I should do. He told me that I knew, and I said I didn't; so he told me, very gently "SPREAD MY WORD". It was such a simple message. I lay there and felt the Holy Spirit start to fill me up with a joy so powerful that I wept.

Marg Prentice, a former member of our church, has been through my difficult journey with me and she prayed for me when I felt unable to pray myself. I simply had to tell her, so I rushed round (once it became an acceptable hour) to share my news. I also wrote it down and have continued with my journal ever since. I am no longer a doubting Thomas!

I used to wake every day with such anxiety, a real feeling of dread; at my worst I would be physically sick. Now when I wake I feel totally peaceful - I pray, I read my copy of "Word of the day (which I highly recommend - see Bob, he usually has copies). I read the bible with such a hunger, it's like being at a wonderful banquet.

The world looked totally different. I was seeing God's creation through his eyes. I was so happy it was like being a child again, or as Harvie said when he became a Christian, Tiggerish.

So did I spread his word? Well yes and no. I shared with close friends and members of another church, but it was St. Luke's, my church, my family, who I wanted to tell the most.

I feel overwhelmed by my experience. The Spirit has come to me repeatedly since this time - he was always there, I just didn't realise it. I think God decided that in my case he was really going to have to show me HE WAS THERE. Many people don't need that - their faith is strong enough without it.

I now understand how people have the strength to die for their faith. I pray, totally confident that God is listening. When the path is difficult, he is right by my side. My lovely Joan, in the choir, has suffered many losses in her life, but she is here every week, smiling - that's faith!

I am very grateful to so many people who have held my hand on my journey, especially Maggie, with Phil keeping everyone up to date on my numerous hospital stays. I love and care about so many of you, the choir and many others. I trust you know who you are. This is my story, my testimony to God; I am spreading his word.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for loving each and every one of us. Thank you for sending your Son to live amongst us and teach us the true meaning of being a Christian. We all fail at times, in thought, word and deed, but you readily forgive us, when we repent, and you let us start anew. Help us all to have the courage and conviction to spread your word, tell of the wondrous gifts being a Christian brings - the joy, peace & love. As the hymn says 'A new commandment I give unto you, to love one another as I have loved you. Amen.

Angie Mullen

## CELEBRATING 500 YEARS SINCE THE REFORMATION IN THE LAND OF MARTIN LUTHER

If you'd been a fly on the wall in the grand baronial hall of the Schloß in Meßkirch one Saturday in October, you would have seen tables set for a grand festive occasion for about 200 people. It was to celebrate 500 years since Martin Luther put up his 95 points where he felt that the church at that time had gone astray. And at that point the protestant church was born.



The occasion was organised for everyone who works in the Deanery of Überlingen-Stockach, clergy and volunteers alike. Also present, dotted around the hall, were some clergy and others from our Deanery of Sefton. I even had Martin Luther sitting on my table - well, not really. It was a theologian, dressed as Martin Luther would have dressed at that time, who gave a talk about his life. The theologian had to dash away once he'd done his after dinner speech, as he was travelling back north to appear on television the next morning. The evening was brought to a close by everybody gathering out in the courtyard and singing a hymn by candlelight.

Over 20 years ago, a partnership between our deanery and the German deanery was established, and this time it was the turn of a group from our deanery to visit Germany. On arrival, we all had a meal followed by a very simple but meaningful service, mainly in English, before everybody was taken to their different parishes to stay.

Thinking back, it's hard to choose the highlights of the long weekend. There were so many beautiful things to see. Every Schloß had something different, all competing in grandeur. My breath was taken away when the priest in the Schloß church in Salem showed us to the area behind the main altar, not open to the public, where only the priests were allowed. There was a further altar there. After saying "I'm not really allowed to do this", he and Hans (the largest German vicar there) went up to the altar and lifted off the top part - a very heavy replica of the golden ark of the covenant! We ended that visit by joining together in a service of evening prayer, in English, led by our Catholic priest!

I was delighted that a visit to one of my favourite spots, the Bible Gallery, had been included in the very busy programme. Thea Groß, a very good friend, has been in charge ever since it began nearly 30 years ago, when the local church thought they had to find a way to reach out to all the tourists who visit Meersburg. It's a very "hands on" way of telling people about the Bible, and lots of groups visit it, besides individual passers-by. We had just missed a huge exhibition showing the life story of Martin Luther with doll figures, but one scene was left behind for us to see. Our visit ended with a working replica of the Gutenberg press. The invention of a printing press enabled copies of the Bible to be produced in larger numbers and more quickly than with the old method of hand copies. It also meant that people could read the Bible in their own language instead of Latin, which was one of Martin Luther's main points. After full training, several members of our group used the press to print out their own copy of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Each suitably attired in hat and leather apron, as the printer would have worn at that time!

The Evangelische church in Baden, to give it its full name, is heavily involved with social work. In particular, with the huge refugee crisis. We all met up with the director for the Deanery and his team one afternoon. I for one was astounded by the number of refugees that Udo and his team have cared for over the years. Recently about 200 refugees have arrived in the deanery. Tibor, a vicar in Markdorf, and host to Harvie and Sally for the visit, has taken a little girl refugee into his family to live with them. He has a wife and three children. He put it very simply - "we have a big house and room for another child". Quite humbling!

When I was talking to Harvie about the visit, I asked him what was the highlight in his view. Although we'd seen some fantastic things, he said it was the conversations that he'd had. He'd hit the nail on the head, as he often does. Yes, we'd had some memorable experiences and worshipped together in beautiful settings. But the main point of the visit, as I said in my little "greetings from St Luke's Formby" slot in the service on Sunday morning in Hagnau, was to share our faith with each other.

It was a great opportunity to talk to each other across the language divide and share, support and encourage each other in our faith.

Joyce Eddlestone

## CHAPLAINCY AND SPIRITUAL CARE SERVICE

Information for churches, faith communities and other interested parties

### From Martin Abrams, Chaplain for Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust



It is over 5 years since I moved to Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust to work as full time hospital chaplain. Both within the Trust, and the chaplaincy and spiritual care service a lot has happened in those years. By way of information sharing I have put together this occasional information sheet. It is intended this should be shared widely within faith communities and beyond.

**Mission Statement:** The Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service aims to offer spiritual, religious and pastoral support to the whole hospital community

**Staff:** In addition to Martin (full time), Rev Jan Fraser was appointed in June 2017 and works 2 days a week and **Rev Jane Morgan** is working 1 day a week until March 2018 to enable Martin to fulfil the role of freedom to Speak up Guardian. In addition there are also 3 bank chaplains, Revs Chris Gregory, Ann Hall and Ken Summers, who support Martin, Jan and Jane with the on call work. **Fr Phil Gregory**, Roman Catholic Chaplain, left Southport in September after 15 years as Trust chaplain and has been replaced by Father Mark Moran.

The Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care service gets **referrals** from many places, including ward staff, the hospital commuter system, faith communities, palliative care team and patients themselves. We pride ourselves in being a responsive service. However there are times when it is assumed we know about people being in hospital, when we do not. This is especially true with Church members and it can cause frustration to all concerned. **We are delighted to support local Churches by visiting members in hospital**, but please do let us know. We prefer to know more than once rather than not at all

The Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service offers a **24/7 On Call Service** for urgent situations. This is staffed by the chaplains and bank chaplains. It is accessed by an on call number available on each ward or via the hospital switchboard.

In September 2017 Martin was appointed as **Freedom To Speak Up Guardian** for the trust. Since the first and second Frances report, following the happenings at the Mid Staffordshire Hospital, a national Guardians Office has been established and every hospital trust has had to appoint a local guardian. The role involves working with the trust leadership with the aim of creating an open culture, where people who speak up are supported, listened to and communicated with. The overall aim is to increase patient safety.

In addition to employed staff there are up to 8 **volunteers** who visit wards regularly. Chaplaincy volunteers have pastoral experience and skills and offer friendship to patients and staff. The trust

will be holding a **volunteer recruitment event** in the autumn. For more information please contact Martin Abrams

**Snapshot of Referrals.** On average we receive over 100 formal referrals a month. There are many more “corridor conversations”, casual callers at the office and informal bedside conversations. Most referrals have a significant number of follow up visits.

Each year the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care service arranges various events, including an adult memorial service, a Christmas baby remembrance service, trees of remembrance and other one off events. Press releases are made about these and details are in the local press.

**Neonatal Natter** is a new group, set up on the neonatal ward, which meets once a month giving an opportunity for past and present parents of neonatal ward children to be supported. The chaplaincy and spiritual care service resources the group.

In February of this year **BBC Songs of Praise** approached the trust about recording a programme here about chaplaincy and spiritual care. The programme was recorded and went out in mid-March. ([www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04x667m](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04x667m)) As well as shadowing Martin there was a focus on baby loss and a very special wedding from Ward 15A.

The Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service participates in the Patient Experience Group, New Nurse Induction, Dementia Group, Bereavement Group, End of Life Group, Midwife Bereavement Training and takes the monthly “Our Babies” service.

Four times a year we run a **faith consultation group**, which has members of hospital staff and local faith communities. The main aims of the faith consultation group are to: be the focus for all issues relating to faith and spirituality within the Trust, be a link between the trust and the local faith communities and offer insights on the role of chaplaincy and spiritual care within the trust. For more information about this please contact Martin Abrams.

Each month up to 100 **thoughts, hopes, intention and prayer cards** are left in the quiet and prayer rooms. The chaplains look at all of these at their monthly gathering.

Did you know the trust has a **Spiritual Care Policy**? It was first adopted in October 2014 and is currently being revised. Copies are on the hospital intranet. Should you wish to see a copy please contact Martin Abrams.

The team work of the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service has been recognised over the last 2 years in the **Hospital Pride Awards**. We were part of the teams who received an award for End of Life Care, Team of the Year (ward 15a) and Service Improvement (Support following baby loss and bereavement).

### **Confidentiality and Information Governance**

Like all services within the hospital the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service is compliant with the information governance policy of the hospital. In practice this means information can-not be shared about any individuals without their consent, even the fact they are in hospital. Occasionally this can cause an issue when patients or faith communities assume things will be communicated automatically. Consent and good communication are key.

***Gideon Bibles** are available in bedside lockers. These are for individual patient use and to comply with infection control guidance each Bible is wrapped. If it is opened it is to be taken home with the patient or recycled. Members of Gideons International visit regularly to replace Bibles or replacement Bibles are available via the chaplaincy office (as are other holy books).*

### **To Contact the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Service**

Telephone: 01704 70 4639, or e-mail [martin.abrams@nhs.net](mailto:martin.abrams@nhs.net)

## CAROLS PAST AND PRESENT

Carols have been sung since the 5th Century and not only at Christmas but also during the whole of Advent.

Sadly, it appears that gone are the Carol Singers who used to disturb us, of an evening, by ringing the door bell, and then singing several well-known carols; we would then open the door and give them a drink, or sweets or money. Yes, groups of adults and young people would gather and sing, for money on one's door step, simply for pleasure and often to collect funds for a charity. It used to be the accepted thing to do during the week leading up to Christmas Day. Now it appears to happen only with Churches Together singing in the supermarkets.

Regularly, a favourite carol, God Rest You Merry Gentlemen, which can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was rendered. In 1843, it was used by Charles Dickens in his book, A Christmas Carol. Some carols can be found to have been in existence as long ago as the 5<sup>th</sup> century; they were in Latin and rather serious as well as devout. Then, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a monk known to us as St Francis of Assisi, with his companions, re-arranged the melodies, as well as the words (eg. In dulci júbilo singhet ende weset vro:- was changed to:- In Dulci Jubilo - Sing And Be Happy).

Many popular carols were born during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries; a little later, a 1588 carol, Ding, Dong! Merrily on High was sung alongside some earlier non-Anglican carols which were in code, like The Twelve Days Of Christmas. This later became very popular in Victorian England. Then, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Methodist Church helped by introducing carols like Stephen Adams', Star of Bethlehem. Between the 1830s to the present day, in shows, films, on radio and television, in jazz and other avenues, even rock-and-roll, new carols have been introduced.

I can remember the past 20 years when there was an annual contest searching for the best Christmas song such as:- Christmas Blues, All I Wanted For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth, Walking In The Air and many more favourites. Christmas can be a Christian musical time of joy and worship of God with voice and instrument. It is not a time to spend lots of money on gifts and especially not on large expensive meals. The shops use Christmas as a time to tempt one to spend, which we often wrongly do, because this can create difficulties in the days afterwards. Yes, do give what you can afford, and enjoy it, but do not over-spend just because you consider it the thing to do. Will God praise you for so doing? I doubt it. Remember, it is God's son's birthday; help Him to enjoy the day by becoming a practising Christian, who regularly attends Church, and brings others to God's Altar. I dare you to do so, to try again, and again, and so on. God bless!

Colin Trollope

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### SMILE LINES - Warning

A local priest and a pastor stood by the side of the road holding up a sign that said, 'The End is Near! Turn yourself around now - before it's too late!' They held up the sign as a car approached.

'Leave us alone, you religious nuts!' yelled the driver as he sped by. A moment later, from around the curve, they heard a big splash. 'Do you think,' ventured the priest, 'we should just put up a sign that says "bridge down" instead?'



## GOD'S LITTLE PEOPLE



Always interested in archaeology, my eyes caught an article in a magazine not so long ago. It seems that on the Palatine Hill in Rome, where the imperial palace stood, archaeologists have been sifting through the site of the quarters used by the imperial page boys in the days of the empire. During the excavations they came across a crude drawing on the remains of a wall. It was of a youth worshipping a man on a cross. Nothing surprising at all in that of course, except that in this case the crucified figure had an asses head! Underneath is scrawled the caption, 'Alexamenos worships his god.'

This isn't the first time that such mockery has come to light from the past. That satirical cartoon is to be found many times in the rubble of the Roman past. It's a comment on how the followers of Jesus were considered in the early days of our faith. In fact the asses head is a common theme

throughout history. Even Shakespeare has it in his *Midsummer's Night Dream*, where Titania falls in love with a rustic called Bottom, who is given an asses head, much to the delight of the villagers.

In other words only a simpleton would worship a condemned criminal as his god. That page boy in ancient Rome had to endure the taunts of the other boys because of this faith. We can imagine the bullying in an establishment like that. How Alexamenos came to his faith we do not know. We do know however that there were Christians in the court from an early age. Yet this boy had come to know Jesus as his lord and he suffered the ridicule which followed. He was made to feel odd, the butt of all the malevolence which boys can often engage in when living together. Reading about Alexamenos reminded me of my days in the army and having to endure the constant and often vicious taunting of those in my squad who found out that I had been given a 48 hour pass in order to go to a selection conference at Nottingham University and had been accepted for training as a priest when demobbed. So my heart goes out to Alexemanos and I think that I understand him even though we are separated by two thousand years.

There was tremendous risk in following the god with the asses head in those days. To become a Christian was not the way to enhance your position in society, especially in the Roman world. The Greek world was just the same for the Greek's prime interest was in wisdom and by that standard Christianity did not stand any test. What could be more ludicrous than to maintain, in sophisticated Greek circles, that God's wisdom lay in a despised executed criminal?

St Paul would have understood Alexamenos and if he had known the lad he would have put his arms round him and said, as he did in his letter to the Church at Rome. 'But God has chosen what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise.' Perhaps Alexamenos had heard that letter read and had received comfort. Paul knew that what appeared to be rubbish to the world was precious in God's sight. Go into any church and see a broken man on a cross. See bread broken and wine out-poured and shared. Yes, he deals with broken things and often he uses broken and unimportant people. Those neither having influence nor affluence. From the first the church was made up of people like Alexamenos - simple, unlearned and unimportant people. Yet of great potential in the eyes of God. Just look at that Rag Bag that we call the Apostles! They are the first examples of what can happen when ordinary people are called by God.

Or perhaps not the first example. For there was one earlier whom God chose. We remember her especially at this time of Christmas as an example of God choosing the unimportant and lowly. Mary, whom one commentator has called, 'The Christian prototype of all little people.' The whole of the Christmas Story centres around very ordinary people. Mary, carpenter Joseph, shepherds and farm labourers. All set in the humble and unsophisticated surroundings of a cave stable.

And what of Mary? We do not know the circumstances of her betrothal and marriage to Joseph at what is presumed to be an early age. We only know of the prevailing culture of her day and in the case of Joseph our knowledge of him is subject to the various legends from a fourth century highly embellished apocryphal document compiled by a Jewish Christian from many sources. In the Gospels there is no further mention of Joseph after Jesus became twelve. These legends tell us that Joseph was an older man, perhaps a widower. So what were the thoughts of the young Mary as the Marriage Broker visited the two families to negotiate the dowry and the arrangements? One thing is certain. Mary did not enter her betrothal and marriage out of love. It was an arranged marriage.

And then it happened. Perhaps she became like Alexamenos, despised and humiliated. Perhaps beaten and locked away in her room. Made to feel like dirt because she was pregnant. You can almost hear the voices raised outside the door. Two families arguing. Joseph yelling at his future mother in law, 'I never touched her.' It took an angel to sort that mess out! And there is Paul again looking over our shoulder and saying, 'But God has chosen what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise.' And Alexamenos, perhaps crying himself to sleep after the bullying of the day is over in that boy's pen in the imperial palace. He knew in his head that his God had no asses head but was the God who came as someone like himself. A boy, a baby even, born in a cave stable. Perhaps he was as utterly astonished at this as was Our Lady when she found that she was to be the mother of the special one.

'He has looked on me,' was her song. 'He has regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.' It was a sign that a new age had dawned, where the small and weak and the unimportant were to be part of God's Kingdom. And Alexamenos? He is there now as well. His God; no longer with an asses head but a Christ in Glory. Thanks be to God for all the little people who have been faithful in the past and who are being faithful today. So at Christmas we again hear the words of the angel in St Luke's Gospel, 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord be with you,' and can add the rest of the church's prayer down the ages. 'Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

May I wish you all a very Happy Christmas,

Revd Roy Baker

## **ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL NEWSLETTER**

In Year 6 we have been looking at the lives of the soldiers during World War 1. We have also looked closely at the awful conditions of the trenches and the letters written by the soldiers. In English, we have imagined what their lives would have been like during war time; everyone in Year 6 has written a letter in the role of a soldier at the front line.

We have also watched a series of videos about the brutalities of war to expand our understanding about it; we felt sorry for the people who fought in the war and lost their lives and also for those who lost friends and loved ones.

At the end of the week – on Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> of November – we led the school's Remembrance Service so we could pay our respects to the soldiers who have served our country and especially those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and died. Our parents attended the service in school, and we also completed another assembly for the rest of the school. At eleven o'clock we observed a two minute silence where we demonstrated our reverence for the fallen.

by Joseph Swain and May Dawson 6W